

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SIL-01 EB-08 HA-05 IO-13 INR-10
EUR-12 AF-10 PA-01 SS-15 SP-02 L-03 /091 W
-----073630 031319Z /44-42
R 030650Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2033

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 5482

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, HS
SUBJ: IRVING BROWN VISIT TO TUNISIA

1. SUMMARY. OVER A FIVE-DAY VISIT, BROWN (AFL-CIO REPRESENTATIVE IN EUROPE) SAW MANY LABOR PERSONALITIES (CURRENT UGTT EXECUTIVE BUREAU AS WELL AS FORMER LEADERSHIP), DEFENSE ATTORNEYS, A RANGE OF RANDOM CITIZENRY, THE PRIME MINISTER, AND HABIB ACHOUR IN PRISON. HE FOUND THE OPPOSING POSITIONS OF GOT AND UGTT FORMER LEADERS HAD HARDENED, WITH RELATIVELY LESS GIVE ON BOTH SIDES. PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA OUTLINED HIS DUTY TO PROCEED WITH TRIAL AND ACHOUR, ON HIS PART, SEEMED TO WELCOME THE PROSPECT. BROWN SAID THAT GEORGE MEANY HAD NOT YET DECIDED ON AFL-CIO STARTEGY VIS-A-VIS THE GOT/UGTT CONFLICT BUT THAT HE FELT THE PRESSURES WHICH HIS SILENCE HAD PRODUCED. END SUMMARY.

2. JUST BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR PARIS, JULY 31, BROWN CALLED UPON ME FOR A DEBRIEFING ON HIS VISIT JULY 27-31. HE WAS SUCCESSFUL IN SEEING BOTH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA AND HABIB ACHOUR, IMPRISONED UGTT EX-SECRETARY GENERAL, MONDAY, JULY 31. HIS BASIC IMPRESSIONS FROM BOTH MEN WERE THAT THEIR POSITIONS HAD CONGEALED, THAT THERE
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SEEMED TO BE NO FLEXIBILITY FOR A PROMISE ON BARGAINING, AND THAT BOTH MEN SEEMED TO WELCOME THE PROSPECT OF THE UPCOMING TRIAL. BROWN SAID THAT NOUIRA LAMENTED THE FACT THAT NOBODY APPEARED TO UNDERSTAND THE GOT POSITION "INCLUDING OUR AMERICAN FRIENDS" BUT THAT HE HAD THE DUTY TO SEE JUSTICE DONE, AND THAT THIS WAS HIS DECISION UNDER NOBODY'S INFLUENCE. BROWN SAID THAT NOUIRA RADIATED

SELF-CONFIDENCE AND CONTROL OF THE SITUATION, WHICH BROWN FELT CONTRASTED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S EARLIER POSITION. BROWN SAID THE PRIME MINISTER DEDUCED ACHOUR'S GUILT: THE UGTT CALLED A GENERAL STRIKE JANUARY 26, VIOLENCE FOLLOWED, ERGO ACHOUR WAS GUILTY. BROWN CHALLENGED THIS REASONING BY INQUIRING ABOUT CONCRETE PROOF IN ACHOUR'S DOSSIER. NOUIRA DISCLAIMED DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROSECUTION EVIDENCE, SAYING THAT THE CASE WAS IN THE HANDS OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE. BROWN VOLUNTEERED TO NOUIRA THAT THE SEEMINGLY RANDOM SAMPLE OF PEOPLE WHO HAD APPROACHED HIM DURING HIS VISIT UNIFORMLY WERE CRITICAL OF THE GOT POSITION. NOUIRA COUNTERED THAT HE EASILY COULD PRODUCE A SAMPLE OF OPINION TO THE CONTRARY.

3. LATER IN THE SAME DAY BROWN VISITED HABIB ACHOUR AT THE TUNIS CIVIL PRISON--A VISIT WHICH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA HIMSELF FACILITATED. BROWN SAID THAT HE FOUND ACHOUR IN HIGH MORALE AND GOOD HEALTH WITH SOME WEIGHT LOSS (WHICH HE NEEDED). HE AND ACHOUR REVIEWED THEIR NUMEROUS PAST DIFFERENCES OVER LIBYA AND OVER TUNISIA'S POSITION ON U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM ILO. BROWN SAID ACHOUR ASKED HIM WHAT WAS THE CURRENT POSITION OF AFL-CIO AND WHETHER IT WOULD ISSUE A PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE GOT/UGTT SITUATION. BROWN ACKNOWLEDGED TO ACHOUR THAT THE AMERICAN LABOR FEDERATION HAD SUFFERED A HEAVY DRAFT

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OF CRITICISM FOR ITS SILENCE ON THE ISSUE, BUT THAT HE (BROWN) THOUGHT IT WISER TO MAINTAIN AFL-CIO'S OPTIONS BY SAYING NOTHING PUBLICLY BUT EXERTING QUIET DIPLOMACY SANS PUBLICITY. BROWN SAID THAT ACHOUR TOTALLY DISCLAIMED ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CIVIL RIOTS WHICH FOLLOWED THE JANUARY 26 GENERAL STRIKE. HE SAID THAT ACHOUR "ALMOST RELISHED" THE PROSPECT OF HIS TRIAL AND THAT HE WOULD DEMAND CONDITIONS WHICH INCLUDED HIS RIGHT TO SPEAK AND TO CONFRONT ALL WITNESSES: BARRING THESE CONDITIONS, HE WOULD STAND MUTE THROUGHOUT THE TRIAL. BROWN SAID THE ACHOUR CAMP SOURCES BELIEVED THE TRIAL WOULD BEGIN AROUND THE MIDDLE OF RAMADAN, APPROXIMATELY AUGUST 15.

4. BROWN TOLD US THAT MEANY WAS FEELING PRESSURES DUE TO AFL-CIO ISOLATION ON THIS ISSUE RELATIVE TO WEST EUROPEAN, ARAB, AFRICAN, AND SOME EAST EUROPEAN TRADE UNION BODIES. HE SAID MEANY HAD NOT YET MADE UP HIS MIND ON THE BEST STRATEGY FOR AFL-CIO TO FOLLOW BUT THAT HE WOULD COMMUNICATE HIS FINDINGS TO MEANY UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN PARIS.

5. BROWN'S VISIT WAS REPORTED IN INDEPENDENT DAILIES

LE TEMPS AND AS-SABAH, AS WELL AS SOCIAL DEMOCRAT
WEEKLY DEMOCRATIE.

6. COMMENT. WE SEE BROWN'S VISIT AS BENEFICIAL IN
SEVERAL ASPECTS. IT SERVED TO ILLUMINATE MORE CLEARLY
THE POSITIONS OF BOTH SIDES IN THIS CONTROVERSY, POSITIONS
TOO OFTEN OBSCURED BY RHETORIC. WE ALSO FEEL THAT
AFL-CIO'S ROLE AS AN ACTIVE AND INTERESTED OBSERVER IS NOW
CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD BY GOT. FINALLY, WE WERE STRUCK BY
APPARENT RAPPROCHEMENT ATTAINED BETWEEN BROWN AND ACHOUR.
EVIDENTLY, THEY HAVE PUT ASIDE PREVIOUS BITTERNESS WHICH
HAD ARISEN DUE TO DIFFERENCES ON VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL
ISSUES.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS, LABOR UNION OFFICIALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TUNIS05482
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780318-0268
Format: TEL
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197808100/aaaadgbr.tel
Line Count: 136
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ecc08457-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: STADIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: STADIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1541453
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: IRVING BROWN VISIT TO TUNISIA
TAGS: ELAB, TS, AFL-CIO, (BROWN, IRVING)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ecc08457-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014